An Essay
on
Colica Pictonum.

Respectfully submitted
to the Faculty of the
Homeopathic Medical College
of Pennsylvania,

on the
28th day of January
One thousand eight hundred & fifty two.

By
I. D. Johnson
of Pennsylvania

Colica Pictonum

Allopathic & Homoeopathic Practice contrasted.

This formidable and distressing disease is produced by the introduction of lead into the system, in various ways, by food respiration and sometimes by cutaneous absorption. Long before its cause was discovered, the disease was known and described by medical writers.

In Germany, however, more than a hundred years ago, persons were in the pernicious practice of introducing lead into their wines, which divulged at once the true nature of the malady. In Devonshire, and other places in England, this disease was at one time considerably prevalent, in consequence of lead being used

by the farmer, to improve the taste and quality of their cider.

In districts where lead is obtained and smelted the disease, not only occurs among the inhabitants, but is said to attack even the domestic animals. All artisans engaged in the manufacture of lead, are more or less subject to this affection; house painters, probably, more so than all others.

The precursory symptoms of this disease, are dull pain in the head; loss of apetite; bad taste in the mouth; slow and hard pulse, obstinate constipation with ineffectual urging to stool; wandering pains through the stomach and bowels, and occasionally nausea and vomiting. After these symptoms have lasted for some time, the pain in the umbilicus becomes exceedingly severe, indeed so intolerable is the pain, that the patient writhes in agony, and is unable to remain in

any position. The pain is principally seated in the region of the umbilicus and pit of the stomach; at first it is dull and remitting, but gradually increases to be very severe and constant; obliging the patient to make firm pressure against the abdomen, with the body in a bent position. In severe cases the abdominal muscles are so much contracted that the spinal column may be readily felt through the anterior walls. The pain in some cases, extends to the arms and hands, down the back and pelvis, often affecting the lower extremities, and sometimes the whole surface of the body. The relief which pressure upon the abdomen affords, will serve to distinguish it from enteritis and other inflammatory affections of the abdominal viscera.

The old school treatment in this disease consists in blood-letting and blistering, with the free use of calomel and opium, given in the form

of pills, in from five to ten grains each, and repeated at short intervals, in order to affect the system as soon as possible.

The following heroic treatment is recommended by one of our most popular medical writers. "Free bleeding from the arm, in the first stage of the malady, can seldom be dispensed with; after which the main object is to touch the gums with mercury, in order to relieve the bowels. Without this precaution the disease will often prove fatal; and even when the patient does survive, paralytic and a crippled constitution are almost sure to follow. To bring on the mercureal impression, and at the same time to relieve the pain, I give ten grains of calomel and two of opium, according to the violence of the attack. Simultaneously a blister should be applied over the abdomen, which as soon as drawn, is to be dressed with mercurial

ointment. It may be even necessary to rub in the ointment on the thighs and arms. So much for Allopathic practice. Before we give the simple salutary and effective treatment of Homoeopathy, we will indulge in a few remarks, on the constitutional effects of the principal remedy above recommended.

When calomel is taken into the system it very soon undergoes a decided and remarkable change. The alkaline constituents of the bile, decompose it, by virtue of the superior affinity which exists between the muriatic acid of the one & the alkalies of the other. The oxide of mercury which remains after this decomposition has taken place, is carried by the circulation of the blood to all parts of the animal economy, and exerts an almost irreparable and deleterious injury on the various mineral compounds of the system. The phosphoric acid which gives hard

weld and solidity to the bones by its union with lime, is attracted by the mercury, which forms a chemicale compound with it; and the lime is abandoned to crumble away, year after year presenting the melancholy picture of incredible physical ruin and constant suffering. To prove that this is but a feeble discription of the effects of chalomel, we will record the testamony of the highest medical authority of the University of Pennsylvania.

Professor Chapman says:—"If you could see what I almost daily see in my practice in this city, persons from the South in the very last stage of wretched existance emaciated to a skeleton, with both tables of the skull almost completely perforated in many places, the nose half gone, with rotten jaws, ulcerated throats, breath more pestiferous, more intolerable than poisonous upas, limbs racked with the pains of the Inquisition, mind

as imbecile as the puling babe, a grievous burden to themselves and a disgusting spectacle to others, you would exclaim as I have often done, "O! the lamentable want of science that dictated the abuse of that noxious drug calomel in the southern States!" Gentlemen, it is a disgraceful reproach to the profession of medicine, it is quackery, horrid unwarranted, murderous quackery. What merit do gentlemen of the south platter themselves they possess by being able to salivate a patient? Cannot the biggest fool in Christendom salivate — give calomel? But I will ask another question. Who can stop its career at will, after it has taken the reins in its own distructive and ungovernable hands? He who, for an ordinary cause, resigns the fate of his patient to mercury, is a vile enemy to the sick; and if he is tolerably popular, will, in one successful season, have paved the way for the bankruptcy of his

for he had enough to do ever afterwards to stop the mercurial breach of the constitutions of his dilapedated patients."

What a comment is this, on the practice, so highly recommended, by one of the most popular writers of his own School.

Homoeopathy shall now claim our attention. According to the experience of my Preceptor Dr Harlan, in the treatment of Painters Colic Nux Vomica exerts the most decided and specific effect. Two years ago, he was called to see a Mr Mc- a house painter who was suffering in this disease, in one of the most painful attacks probably, ever witnessed by a physician. He gave him a few globules, prepared from the sixth dilution of Nux vomica, and in fifteen minutes or less, the patient was relieved. Afterwards, he furnished Mr Mc with a vial of the medicine which he constantly carried with him; and who

has since that time cured himself of a dozen and more different attacks, and often with a single dose; yet so sudden and severe has been some of the attacks, that he has been obliged to request another to pour him out the remedy.

As Jahr Hastman & others do not mention Nux vomica as a remedy for poisoning by lead, but recommend Opium, Bell, Alum or Plat. I hope this statement will be instrumental, with the experience of others, in placing Nux among the first remedies in the treatment of colica pictonum.